

# *The Johnson Letter*

*From the desk of*  
Michigan State Senator

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## **Legislative Year-in-Review**



With the 2004 legislative session just around the corner and 2003 behind us, Senator Johnson and colleagues summarized some of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Legislature's accomplishments to date. Although a great deal of time and energy was spent mending a depleted state budget, and even while the Governor's office and the Legislature experienced a partisan split for the first time since 1998; a significant amount of strides were made to assist Michigan families, seniors and especially students. Below are some of the highlights in 2003.

- The legislature resolved nearly \$3 billion in deficits in the current and previous fiscal years. Continual revenue shortfalls put the budget, and Senator Johnson as chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, front and center in 2003.
- Michigan Freedom to Work for Individuals with Disabilities Law, sponsored by Senator Johnson, allows disabled Medicaid recipients to earn up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level before having to contribute to Medicaid premiums. Individuals enrolled in the Michigan Freedom to Work for Individuals with Disabilities Law would be able to accumulate assets up to \$75,000 combined with retirement, IRA and 401K accounts and earn income above the current Medicaid specified eligibility. With the state's current budget situation in mind, Senator Johnson worked closely with the Department of Community Health in order to develop a cost neutral program.
- Reauthorized the Michigan Economic Growth Authority (MEGA), which was set to expire Dec. 31, to continue the state's main tax-incentive granting authority used to spur economic development.
- Senator Johnson sponsored and passed legislation completely retooling and updating how credit unions are regulated in the state of Michigan. Credit unions will now find it easier to operate with less stringent requirements on their membership and also have the opportunity to offer 30 day loans of up to \$1,000 with an interest rate lower than that of pay day lending corporations.
- Senator Johnson sponsored and won approval for legislation eliminating the sunset on the Safe Delivery of Newborns Law, more commonly known as the Abandoned Baby Law. The original statute allowed parents to surrender their newborn babies in less than 72 hours at hospitals, fire departments or police stations without legal reprisal. The Safe Delivery Act, which now will continue indefinitely, has been responsible for saving the lives of seventeen babies in its first two years.

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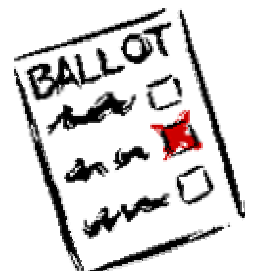
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## **Election Consolidation Legislation Becomes Law**

Legislation consolidating all elections into four predetermined dates (the last Tuesday in February, or the Tuesday after the first Monday in May, August, or November) has recently become law. Under the new law, school districts no longer have the authority to administer and operate their own elections. Instead, local units of government will administer school-related elections in addition to their traditional election responsibilities. The law also allows a school district to call one special bond, millage or debt election per year on a Tuesday "floater" date that is not on one of the four proposed regular election dates, and is not within 35 days of one of them, if a petition is signed by at least 10 percent of the number of electors voting in the last gubernatorial election in that district, or 3,000 electors, whichever is less. Senator Johnson supported the legislation and is pleased with its scope and intent. "I believe this legislation will simplify elections in Michigan, fostering an increase in participation and understanding by the voters."



## School Aid Payments Reduction Trimmed to \$84/Pupil

The State's Budget Director announced last Thursday, that cuts in school aid payments are less than had been expected in the most recent Executive Order. School districts were notified that state aid reductions will be limited to \$84 per pupil, down from \$196 from the Governor's original proposal in early December.

The Senate Fiscal Agency expects later payments to be reduced further, by possibly \$5 to \$10 per pupil following the January revenue estimating conference, which will provide the most recent revenue estimates from the state sales tax and the state education property tax. Also expected to be a factor is a 2,000 student decline statewide.

The reduced proration estimates were greatly enhanced by a \$113.7 million higher than expected surplus in the school aid fund, from the 2002-03 budget.

The negotiated six-month pause in rolling back the income tax rate to 3.9 percent from 4 percent, generated about \$90 million into the school aid fund.

Another positive sign is the School Aid Fund, could be up by nearly \$400 million for the 2003-04 fiscal year, to a total of \$11 billion.

"While this is good news for now," Senator Johnson said. "We are no where near out of the woods."



## FLU SEASON HELPFUL HINTS

State officials report that influenza activity in Michigan has peaked, however, the flu season is not over. Symptoms of influenza, more commonly known as the flu, include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, and runny or stuffy nose. Gastro-intestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, are much more common among children than adults.

According to the Michigan Department of Community Health (DCH), a person who is sick with the flu is contagious. Adults may be contagious from 1 day **before** developing symptoms to up to 7 days **after** getting sick. Children can be contagious for longer than 7 days.

The DCH warns that certain people are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu. This group includes people age 65 years and older, and those of any age with chronic medical conditions. Pregnant women and children between 6 months and 23 months of age also are at risk from flu complications. Children under 6 months old can also get very sick from the flu, but they are too young to get a flu vaccine. The best way to protect them is to make sure that you, their family members, and their caregivers are vaccinated.

### Preventing the Flu

Flu shots are available at the Oakland County Health Division Pontiac\* and Southfield\*\* offices for children under age 9 who received their first dose of flu vaccine at the Health Division and need their second dose. The "Flu Mist" is no longer available at the Oakland County Health Division. There is a cost of \$7 for the shot and it is necessary to bring identification and insurance cards. Vaccine supplies are limited and **will be given while supplies last** on a first come, first serve basis.

The following steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses like flu:

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too. If possible stay at home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

### What to Do If You Get Sick This Flu Season

If you develop the flu, it is advisable to get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco. Also, you should take medications to relieve the symptoms of flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and fever – without first speaking to your doctor). If, however, your flu symptoms are unusually severe (for example, if you are having trouble breathing), you should consult your health care provider right away.

For More information, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) or call the National Immunization Hotline at (800) 232-2522. For more information about the Oakland County Health Department flu shot clinics, call the flu vaccination hotline at (800) 434-3358 or call the Oakland County Health Division Nurse-On-Call at (248) 858-1406.

**\*Pontiac Office of the Oakland County  
Health Department  
1200 North Telegraph Rd.  
Pontiac, MI 48341  
(248) 858-1280**

**\*\*Southfield Office of the Oakland County  
Health Department  
27725 Greenfield Rd.  
Southfield, MI 48076  
(248) 424-7000**

## Senate Provides Michigan Workers Better HealthCare

Small businesses in Michigan will see relief from one of the state's most onerous tax burdens, opening the door for greater healthcare benefits for working families, thanks to a proposed measure overwhelmingly passed by the legislature and most recently by the Governor. Senate Bills 672 and 673 will reduce the taxes paid by employers on healthcare benefits under the state's Single Business Tax by 20 percent in 2005 and an additional 20 percent in 2006. This legislation created the 41st and 42nd tax cuts in the era of Republican-led tax relief. The Senate has worked to reach a reasonable and responsible compromise with the governor on addressing the state-budget deficit. This plan to address healthcare concerns of employers and employees was part of that compromise. The \$15 million in savings for 2005 and 2006 can be used by businesses to invest in jobs and employees.



## Unemployment & Labor Force Down For November *December Numbers Pending Release Soon*

According to the Department of Labor & Economic Development, unemployment was down across the state in November. Unfortunately so was the labor force and payroll jobs declined across the state.

The state's 12 labor market reports were also released by the department, representing increases over the past year with Saginaw experiencing the only decline, with 0.5 percent decrease. Northwest Lower Michigan led growth rates in both queries, with its workforce up 4.3 percent to 152,050 and employment up 3.1 percent to 140,750.

At the county level, Keweenaw County topped the state with 15.1 percent unemployment, however, employment levels in the rest of the Upper Peninsula region produced 7 percent overall unemployment. The Northeast Lower Michigan region reported 9.5 percent unemployment, Flint at 8.5 percent, Saginaw-Bay-Midland at 7.5 percent and Northwest Lower Michigan at 7.4 percent.

The northern regions experienced the only unemployment increases. Northeast Lower Michigan led the three with unemployment increasing from 7.8 percent in October. Upper Peninsula unemployment was 5.8 percent in October, while Northwest Lower Michigan unemployment was 6.6 percent in October.

Washtenaw County held its position for the lowest unemployment at 2.9 percent, with the Ann Arbor region also holding at the bottom with 3.6 percent. That was down from 3.9 percent in October. Oakland County decreased from 4.9 percent to 4.7.

The Lansing area saw the largest drop in unemployment rate, to 4.3 percent in November from 6.5 percent in October. It also saw the largest increase in employment for the month, up 1.2 percent to 243,900.

All 12 regions saw unemployment increase from November 2002, but Benton Harbor and the Saginaw area tied for the largest increase at 1.6 points. Benton Harbor increased to 6.9 percent from 5.3 percent, while Saginaw increased to 7.5 percent from 5.9 percent.

Only the Kalamazoo-Battle Creek area saw total workforce increases for the month, up .3 percent to 235,500. Saginaw saw the largest workforce drop, down 1.4 percent to 201,600.

December 2003 figures have not been issued due to a holiday delay, however, federal numbers remained stable. Unfortunately, only 1000 jobs were added nationally.

### Questions or Comments?

**Contact Senator Shirley Johnson**

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